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OO RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHNE #2003/01 2031221
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 211221Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2713
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002003

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MENON SEEKS INDO-BANGLA COUNTER-TERROR EFFORT

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Mohd Touhid Hossain met with Indian Foreign Minister Shivshankar Menon during his July 17 visit to New Delhi. During a joint press conference, both expressed interest in addressing security issues, specifically cross-border terrorism and escalating violence in Northeast India. Both ministers also announced that pressing political and security issues would be raised at the Home Secretary-level when talks reconvene later this year. Neither side presented specific details, but the meeting appeared to signal progress for bilateral Indo-Bangla relations. Bangladesh's handover of four alleged insurgents just prior to the talks may be one indication that they are having an effect. END SUMMARY.

Security Challenges Discussed

¶2. (U) Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Mohd Touhid Hossain discussed a full range of bilateral issues with Indian Foreign Minister Shivshankar Menon during his visit to New Delhi on July 17. As reported in the Indian press, Hossain and Menon announced joint efforts to face impending political and security challenges -- including on-going Naxalite-led violence in India's northeast, Indo-Bangla cross-border terrorism, and ethno-linguistic insurgency groups -- reiterating that terrorism is a great threat and challenge to the democratic systems of both countries.

Menon Calls for Bangla Security Cooperation

¶3. (U) During a joint press conference with Hossain on July 17, Menon called for result-oriented talks on pressing security issues with Bangladesh. Menon sought Hossain's cooperation in tracking down suspects involved in several terrorist attacks, including the July 2006 serial train explosions in Mumbai. Perpetrators of the attack are believed to have links with Bangladesh-based insurgency group Harkat-ul-Jehad-e-Islami (HUJI). Both ministers emphasized that the security of both countries is inter-linked and that more specific counter-terrorism issues will be discussed at the Home Secretary-level later this year. Other aspects of the bilateral relationship were discussed, including economic

and commercial cooperation and water access.

¶4. (U) This follows successful bilateral efforts on July 12 to apprehend four Indian alleged insurgents in the Indo-Bangla border region, including three militants from the extremist National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) group and one smuggler, which was the first official recognition by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) of Indian insurgency presence in Bangladesh territory. The NDFB militants were arrested by Bangladeshi authorities in 2006 after crossing the border to undergo militant training along the Meghalaya border district, according to Indian press, and were extradited July 12 after months of close coordination between BDF and Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Indian press reports have raised hopes that greater bilateral security cooperation will lead to the deportation of jailed Indian militant Anup Chetia, General Secretary of the radical United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

Comment: Strengthening the Bilateral Relationship

¶5. (SBU) Comment: While failing to reach concrete results on important bilateral issues, Hossain's visit was seen here as an effort on part of the Bangladesh Government to forge closer diplomatic relations with India. Bilateral relations, specifically joint counter-terrorism initiatives, are expected to progress further at the Home Secretary-level when both countries reconvene talks. END COMMENT.

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